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USDA/FAS for Dr. Sylvana Li

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SUBJECT: Red-Dead Project Feasibility Study Moving Towards Start-Up

11. (SBU) Summary: The feasibility study for the Red Sea to Dead Sea water conveyance project ("Red-Dead"), strongly supported by Jordan as a source of fresh water, is gradually moving towards starting up, perhaps as early as fall 2006. The World Bank is planning a donors meeting for the feasibility study, and is working with confirmed donors to finalize the paperwork for contributions. Palestinian participation in the Red-Dead Steering Committee will have to be structured to avoid contact with Hamas and the Palestinian Authority. End summary.

Study Will Determine Feasibility of Desalinating Red Sea Water and
Putting Byproduct into the Dead Sea

12. (U) BACKGROUND: The "Red-Dead" project, conceptual only at this stage, proposes to pump and channel nearly 2 billion cubic meters of seawater annually from the Gulf of Aqaba north 110 miles through Wadi Araba/Arava to hydropower and desalination plants 300 meters below sea level near the Dead Sea. The fresh water would go to domestic users in Jordan, and the briny byproduct would be dumped into the Dead Sea. The "beneficiary parties" of Jordan, Israel and the Palestinian Authority agreed on April 19, 2005 to Terms of Reference for a 2-year, \$15.5 million feasibility study to be administered by the World Bank. USAID/Jordan is contributing \$1.5 million to the study. The level of the Dead Sea is falling at more than a yard per year because its feed water is taken off upstream by Israel, Jordan and Syria for irrigation and domestic use, and because of industrial use by chemical factories on both sides of the Dead Sea itself.

Jordan Views Red-Dead as Critical

13. (U) On June 8, NEA Senior Advisor for Science and Technology Dr. Chuck Lawson and emboffs discussed Red-Dead with Minister of Water and Irrigation Zafer Alem. (Other water issues are reported septel.) Alem told Lawson that Red-Dead is critical for Jordan not only as a source of water, but also as a concrete sign of regional cooperation and as a way to protect the ecology of the Dead Sea area.

Palestinian Representative on Steering Committee
is Obstacle

14. (SBU) Lawson told Minister Alem that because no USG funds will go to any governmental party - and because there is no contact between U.S. officials and the Palestinian Authority - there are no obstacles to USG support for the feasibility study. Note: USG funding for the feasibility study will go to a World Bank Trust Fund and be disbursed directly to consulting companies. Palestinian representation on the Steering Committee, however, is problematic for both Israel and the World Bank, which leads the Steering Committee. The World Bank had asked Jordan to take the lead in finding a solution.

World Bank Intends to Hold Donors Conference

15. (U) Lawson told Minister Alem that the U.S., France, Holland and Japan are confirmed donors to the feasibility trust fund, and that Canada, Spain and Sweden have expressed interest. World Bank representative Vahid Alavian previously told Lawson that the World Bank has firm commitments for roughly \$10 million of the total \$15.5 million cost of the study. The World Bank wants to finalize paperwork for transfers to the trust fund, beginning with the United States. AID/Amman is working on draft language for the USG's Trust Fund Agreement. The World Bank will also start the process for tendering the contracts for the study, and to get wavering donors to fish or cut bait. The World Bank is planning a donors meeting, probably in Paris and perhaps during the summer, to move arrangements forward.

16. (U) Dr. Lawson has cleared this cable.

RUBINSTEIN